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Persons with disabilities
guide to the internet

What do I need to use the Internet?

The basic requirements for connecting to the Internet are described in our fact sheet, "Everything you need to know to get connected."

If you have a visual impairment, you might want to acquire a text browser that ignores the highly graphical nature of the Web and strips out the images leaving just the text. Used with your screen reader, you can often get the full range of information provided on a Web site. There are even Web browsers designed to work specifically with voice synthesizers.

Fortunately, many of the most modern screen readers and most other assistive technologies work quite well with graphical browsers for Microsoft Windows™ or Macintosh systems.

Where can I get assistive technology?

Assistive devices are available from a wide variety of sources. Some products, such as voice-recognition systems, ergonomic keyboards and pointing devices, are available in most computer stores. Other devices are available either directly from a manufacturer or from vendors who specialize in assistive technology. Contact a community group that is familiar with your needs to help you find appropriate technology.

Are all Web sites accessible?

Some are, some aren't. There are, however, substantial national and international efforts under way to ensure that Web sites are as accessible as possible. The Government of Canada has committed to make all its Web

sites accessible over the next few years. In the meantime, if you find a Web site that is not accessible to you, take advantage of the contact information found on most sites to send a message to the organization. Tell them what was inaccessible and why visiting the site was important to you. This will send a positive message for change to Web site operators.

Are public computers accessible?

Some Internet access sites in places such as public libraries have been equipped with assistive devices. Federally funded Community Access Program (CAP) sites are being encouraged to make accessibility a priority in their design. Contact your local access point (be it a library or CAP site) to inquire about its accessibility features.

Last words

Finally, the Internet will not eliminate a disability, but it certainly gives you the choice of whether your disability is an issue as you work, play or learn with everyone else in the on-line world.

Web sites of interest

Connecting Canadians Initiative
<http://connect.gc.ca/>

The Community Access Program
<http://cap.unb.ca/>

The Web Accessibility Initiative
<http://www.w3.org/WAI/>

The Integrated Network of Disability Information and Education
<http://indie.ca/>



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Getting Started

Persons with Disabilities' Guide to the Internet

The Internet is opening doors to business, entertainment and lifelong learning for all Canadians, regardless of where they live or even how they live. This is especially true for those who live with some kind of disability.

The Internet is providing an increasingly level playing field for people with the widest range of abilities. The Internet may yet become the ultimate citizens' forum where all people can communicate and participate in the full circle of modern life.

What's out there for me?

The world awaits. You are limited only by your own interests and imagination.

The Internet makes it easy to join "virtual communities." If you have a disability, one of your virtual communities might include others who share your lifestyle. Most national and many local community organizations have Web sites and discussion groups to share information about support, services and events.

If you have hobbies or special interests, there are certainly many virtual communities you can join.

E-mail and "chat" services provide a fast, reliable method for keeping in touch with the people or organizations that are important to you.

The World Wide Web is becoming *the* source for information and entertainment — on demand. You can shop for clothes, books, computers and even food. You can read

about a vacation destination, identify accessible accommodations and activities, then reserve and pay for your travel — all on-line. A growing number of government services are also being made available on-line.

There are many business opportunities that are well suited to the Internet. You can open a "virtual storefront" to sell merchandise or services. Many small or home-based businesses can reach a much wider marketplace than was ever before possible.

What do I need to use a computer?

If you already use a computer at home or work, you may be using some sort of assistive technology to overcome the barriers raised by standard computers and software.

If you are blind or have a visual impairment, you may be using a screen reader and voice synthesizer to hear the information that appears on a computer display. If you have low vision you might use a screen magnifier.

If you have a mobility impairment, you might be using an adapted keyboard, pointing device, touch-screen or switch system to control your computer. Perhaps you use a voice-recognition system to work with your computer.

If you are deaf, hard of hearing or require some augmentative speaking aid, your computer can be used as a virtual teletype or talking machine to allow you to communicate with other people.

If you have a learning disability, there are tools you can use to overcome writing, spelling, grammatical or communication difficulties.



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